

2004 Legislature

Top priorities for a new year

Dear friends and neighbors,

We have the opportunity to improve our lives and our communities for the better. As your state representative, I'm committed to making state government more accessible and accountable. It should serve as an effective catalyst for positive change – not a hindrance to your success and prosperity.

Fiscal responsibility is first and foremost in my mind as I get ready to serve you again in Olympia. I will focus on strengthening families and the economy.

While gains were made last session, more work needs to be done to preserve and create jobs. We must maintain a responsible approach to deciding what state government can do for Washingtonians. We do this by evaluating state government's top priorities, examining where our tax dollars are currently being spent and how efficiently, and supporting key programs with existing resources.

Your feedback helps me do a better job of representing you and your family. Please continue to share your thoughts, concerns and questions. With local priorities in mind, I strive to work in cooperation with fellow lawmakers to accomplish the challenges before us, including putting Washington back on track to economic prosperity, making sure families can get affordable health care, and maintaining quality in our schools.

Sincerely,


Mike Armstrong
State Representative



Representative Mike Armstrong

12th Legislative District

Representative **Mike Armstrong** • 12th District

Families and employers deserve continued diligence in the fight against new taxes

Here are some interesting facts to consider when you think about our state's finances:

- In 2003, lawmakers closed a \$2.7 billion budget deficit without raising taxes.
- The current budget provides reserves of \$488 million.
- The state department of Labor & Industries instituted a 9.8 percent increase in workers comp rates – the second such employer-paid increase in two years.
- Washington's minimum wage increased to \$7.16 an hour this year – becoming the highest in the nation.

Last session, we passed a no-new-tax operating budget designed to help the neediest in our communities and create a more competitive economic climate that will

bring jobs to Washington. We must continue to be fiscally responsible in 2004.

I'll do everything I can to make sure we end 2005 with an operating budget that is sustainable and doesn't raise taxes or cut core services. We must also prepare for lean times by creating a reliable "rainy-day fund" that

will protect taxpayers against needless tax increases during economic downturns.



We must create an economic climate that will bring jobs home

In order to make Washington more competitive for attracting and keeping family-wage jobs, I support:

- Reforming the workers' compensation program;
- Making significant adjustments to the minimum wage;
- Lifting the regulatory burden; and
- Renewing and extending tax incentives.

We must give greater consideration to the effects of agency rules on individuals, employers and their workers.

As the ranking Republican on the State Government Commit-

tee, I support legislation to make sure state rule-making agencies don't overstep their bounds. They should be able to bear the burden of defending their rules, and the Legislature should review them before they go into effect.

Tax policies that help encourage investment in Washington will go a long way toward supporting growth and more jobs.

I'm supporting just such legislation, House Bill 2339, that will provide aluminum smelters with the tax relief necessary to remain viable and continue providing 400 of our own citizens with good jobs. This legislation would apply to all aluminum smelters in Washington, including one of our area's largest employers, Alcoa.

Finally, the lack of competition in the state-run industrial insurance system is causing great hardship on 70 percent of Washington's employers. We must follow on the good work started last session and continue fixing the workers' comp system.



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Education on the forefront

Education is the number one constitutional priority for the state, and 45 percent of the state budget goes to support K-12 education.



Despite this, the high school drop out rate in Washington was 32 percent last year, and up to 50 percent of high school students entering college required remedial education.

In order to strengthen our schools and provide all students with a quality, basic education, I support:

- Improving the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) by allowing for retesting; and
- Ensuring that we have effective and empowered educators in every classroom by recruiting, retaining and rewarding our teachers.

Health care solutions at hand

Consider:

- The Washington State Medical Association (WSMA) reported a 31 percent increase in the number of doctors leaving our state.
- 19 percent of WSMA doctors say they have stopped delivering babies and another 8 percent say they plan to.

Washington families, especially in rural areas, are losing access to health care services. Health care costs are skyrocketing and while the vast majority of people have health care coverage, the cost of that coverage is creating a crisis.



The Legislature can be part of the solution by removing government mandates and giving employers greater flexibility to offer working families affordable, basic health coverage. We must also pass liability reforms that will control the escalating cost of malpractice insurance and keep good doctors in our communities.

***Rep. Armstrong
conferring with
fellow lawmakers
in committee.***



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Supporting our law enforcement community

We all read with horror last year the account of Chelan County Sheriff Deputy Saul Gallegos' death by his own weapon, killed by attackers while defending the public. I proudly introduced legislation to make sure we do everything possible to prevent this from happening again.



The Saul Gallegos Peace Officer Survival Act of 2004 would provide our law enforcement officers with essential training in how to take back firearms and defend themselves when criminals try to use their own weapons against them. More than 250 Washington peace officers have lost their lives this way. It's time we break this deadly cycle.

Keep in touch...

I want to hear from you

If you have questions regarding issues addressed here or any other topics that arise as the 2004 legislative session moves forward, just call me or contact me directly **via e-mail at armstron_mi@leg.wa.gov**.

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